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U.S. Military Edge 'Gradually Eroding,' CIA Director Says

By Warren Brown

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Central Intelligence Agency director Stansfield Turner said yesterday he believes the Russians are trying to compensate for economic and other weaknesses by building a powerful military force.

"I believe the Soviets think in 19th Century power terms," Turner said in a televised interview. "I think they're trying to compensate for their other weaknesses — economic, ideological and political—by building a military force that they hope will weigh in the balance for them."

The CIA director, appearing on "Face the Nation" (CBS, WTOP), said he thinks the U.S.-Soviet military balance "is gradually eroding toward the Soviet side." But he added that the United States "can and will be able to redress that" potential imbalance "because the people of the United States are perceiving this need."

Turner—differing with others who also have expressed concern about a possible Soviet military superiority or equivalency—said he does not believe the United States needs a massive new military program to meet the Soviet challenge.

Instead, he said "it's going to be necessary that we put enough resources, enough attention—enough interest into this—to realize where we have to strengthen ourselves."

The American response to a Soviet military buildup must come from the economic and intelligence sectors as well as from the military, Turner said.

For example, the CIA will "very closely" monitor the strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union, he said.

"My job, as I see it, is to advise (American officials) whether we can verify what is agreed" in the SALT negotiations, Turner said. "One of the greatest contributions we're going to make will be (using) the ingenuity of the intelligence community to let us go ahead with the arms negotiations."

Turner, on the job for 10 days, had great praise for the employees of the CIA, which has come under intense criticism in recent years.

"I am impressed that after several years of considerable badgering in the press, after considerable criticism, the morale and the attitude of the professionals—not only in the CIA but in the entire intelligence community—is quite good," he said. "It's surprising that it's held up this well," he remarked, calling the CIA employees "a very professional and dedicated group of men and women."

The CIA director said he thinks some of the media coverage of his agency has been "excessive." But he

added: "I'm not questioning any right of the press to make its criticisms or to make its comments. I would like to see some of it more objective and balanced. But that's a matter of opinion."

On another matter, Turner defended the practice of making secret financial contributions to foreign leaders. Such payments to Jordan's King Hussein were disclosed Feb. 13 by The Washington Post.

Turner would neither confirm nor deny that report, or reports that the CIA has carried out an order from President Carter to stop such payments.

Turner said secret payments by one government to another are nothing new.

"That procedure of secret foreign aid was actually started—with respect to the United States—on Nov. 29, 1776, when Benjamin Franklin went to Paris to arrange the secret delivery of aid from the King of France to George Washington," Turner said.

He added: "I think that says foreign aid sometimes in secrecy is a very common and very legitimate tool of foreign policy."

Turner was asked if that meant it was proper for the South Korean government to make secret payments to members of Congress, as has been disclosed.

He responded: "That is an entirely different matter. It's a matter of bribery versus a matter of aid and support to a friend."